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ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
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FM AMEMBASSY DAKAR  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0932  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS DAKAR 000917

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL AND INR/AA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [SG](#)

SUBJECT: SENEGAL: PRESIDENTIAL TERM OF OFFICE INCREASED

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On July 28, the Senegalese National Assembly adopted a constitutional amendment to increase the presidential term of office from five to seven years. To end rumors that President Abdoulaye Wade was seeking to increase his term, the GOS finally inserted in the amendment a sentence in the draft amendment indicating clearly that the change will not be retroactive. Opposition parties sought to protest during the vote but the GOS did not authorize the demonstration deployed public security forces around the National Assembly to prevent any disruption. END SUMMARY.

A mysterious change  
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¶2. (SBU) The initiative to amend the constitution was originated by President Wade himself. A senior member of the Assembly who drafted the amendment and its justification under Wade's instruction told Embassy that he was in direct contact with President Wade's office on the issue. He said that Wade never told him why he wanted this change and what his objectives are. He added that Wade himself asked Minister of Justice Madicke Niang to present last minute modification to the amendment to state unequivocally that the change does not apply to his current term. The official rationale provided by GOS is that elected presidents take at least two years to learn the job and do not have the necessary time to implement their projects. Imam MBaye Niang, an opposition National Assembly deputy, who did not vote in favor of the amendment, objected that Wade should not take his own limitations as a basis for a constitutional change.

Wade Can Run in 2012  
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¶3. (SBU) With this amendment Wade could run for a seven-year term in 2012. However, given Wade's age, most observers think it unlikely that he will run again. Some observers speculate that the longer term is a tactic to divide opposition figures and to prevent them from supporting one candidate against Wade or his chosen successor in 2012. The longer term of office means that by supporting one candidate to be elected for seven years opposition leaders would have to be altruistic enough to potentially sacrifice their own presidential ambitions for good.

Comment  
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¶4. (SBU) Some constitutional scholars and experts argued before the vote that this new amendment needed to be adopted by referendum according to Article 27 of the Constitution. However, Wade and his large parliamentary majority had a different opinion. As confirmed by Justice Minister Niang before the Assembly, faced with an opposition that does not recognize his legitimacy, Wade has decided to move on with institutional changes without seeking political consensus or consulting his opponents. Some observers have argued that such an approach, which is contrary to local political traditions, could undermine the very foundation of Senegal's democratic system.

